

GENE BYERS

MY NAVY CAREER
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I JOINED THE NAVY IN JUNE OF 1940. I WENT THRU NINE WEEKS TRAINING AT GREAT LAKES TRAINING STATION. I REPORTED ABOARD THE USS OKLAHOMA FOR DUTY IN BREMERSTON, WASHINGTON NAVAL SHIP YARD.

WE LEFT THE YARD FOR A TRIAL RUN, COMING OUT OF BREMERSTON THE FOG WAS HEAVY, AND ON THAT DAY WE SET A RECORD THAT NO OTHER SHIP IN THE NAVY HAS EVER BROKEN. WE COLLIDED WITH A BARGE LOAD OF BOX CARS AND TANKERS. HEAD LINES IN THE PAPER READ, "BATTLE SHIP RAMS FREIGHT TRAIN". ALSO THE OKLAHOMA NEVER FIRED A SHOT IN ANGER.

AFTER GETTING THE HOLE PATCHED IN THE SIDE OF THE SHIP, WE LEFT THE SHIP YARD FOR HAWAII VIA LONG BEACH. WE SPENT A FEW MONTHS IN HAWAII ON MANEUVERS. ON OUR TRIP BACK TO THE STATES WE RAN INTO A STORM, AND BROKE A SHAFT AND HAD TO SPEND A MONTH OR SO GETTING A NEW SHAFT INSTALLED, AND AGAIN WE WENT BACK TO HAWAII. WHILE OUT ON MANEUVERS WE COLLIDED WITH THE ARIZONA AND HAD TO GO INTO THE YARD AT PEARL. AFTER COMING OUT OF THE YARD WE WENT ON MORE MANEUVERS, AND ON DEC 5th WE CAME INTO PEARL HARBOR, AND TIED UP ALONG SIDE OF THE FLAG SHIP MARYLAND, SO THE ADMIRAL COULD HOLD INSPECTION THROUGHOUT THE SHIP. ON DEC 7th THE OKIE TOOK FOUR TO SIX TORPEDOES IN THE PORT SIDE, CAUSING HER TO SINK WITHIN NINE TO FIFTEEN MINUTES. AFTER THE RAID STARTED.

I HAD JUST FINISHED TAKING A SHOWER AND WAS STANDING IN THE COMPARTMENT DRYING MYSELF. I HAD PUT THE RECORD ON WITH BING CROSBY SINGING " CLEMENTINE" , WHEN THE FIRST TORPEDO HIT. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS SO I SET THE NEEDLE BACK ON THE RECORD (WHICH WAS KNOCKED OFF WHEN THE TORPEDO HIT). AFTER THE THIRD TIME THIS HAPPENED AND THE WORD WAS PASSED TO "MAN BATTLE STATIONS" I LEFT BING TO HIS SINGING AND HEADED FOR NUMBER ONE TURRET WHICH WAS MY BATTLE STATION. I TRIED TO GO UP ON DECK BUT THE STRAFING WAS SO BAD I HAD TO TURN BACK AND GO DOWN TO THE SECOND DECK AND WORK MY WAY UP TO THE GUN, AND WHEN I REACHED THE GUN THE SHIP WAS LISTING SO BAD. THE ORDER WAS GIVEN TO "ABANDON SHIP". I WENT OUT THE ESCAPE HATCH ON DECK IN WATER WAIST DEEP/ I HAD TO JUMP UP TO GET HOLD OF THE LIFE LINE, AND THEN JUMP OVER THE SIDE, BUT I WAS SO COVERED WITH OIL THAT I COULDN'T GET A GRIP ON THE LINE SO I COULD CLIMB IT. WHILE I WAS IN THE WATER THE WEST VIRGINIA'S ANTI AIRCRAFT GUNS BLEW UP SETTING THE OIL ON FIRE. I TIED THE LINE AROUND MY ARM AND TWO SAILORS PULLED ME ABOARD THE MARYLAND. I HELPED MAN THE GUNS ABOARD SHIP. AFTER THE RAID WAS OVER AN OFFICER TOLD ME TO DELIVER A MESSAGE TO THE NEVADA AND RETURN. WHEN I RETURNED TO THE MARYLAND OUR EX CAPTAIN E.J. FOY (WHO WAS RELIEVED OF COMMAND AFTER THE COLLISION WITH THE ARIZONA). WAS THERE, HE ROUNDED UP ALL THE OKLAHOMA SAILORS TOOK US OVER TO THE SUB BASE, WE ALL WASHED IN KEROSENE TO GET THE OIL OFF AND THEN SHOWERED, AND THEN WE GATHERED IN THE MESS HALL AND THE CAPTAIN HAD THEM SERVE US A DINNER, CONSISTING OF BAKED HAM AND ALL THE TRIMMINGS.

THE NIGHT OF THE 7th I WAS SLEEPING ON THE VERANDA OF THE MESS HALL AT THE SUB BASE, WHEN GUNS STARTED FIRING AND THE SKY WAS FULL OF SHELLS, THEY HEARD PLANES, THINKING THEY WERE THE JAPS COMING BACK, THEY SHOT SOME OF THEM DOWN. IT TURNED OUT THAT THE PLANES WERE OFF ONE OF OUR CARRIERS (THE ENTERPRISE) COMING IN ON RADIO SILENCE.

I REMAINED AT PEARL FOR A WEEK, HELPING IN RESCUE EFFORTS ABOARD THE OKIE I WAS THEN SENT ABOARD THE DESTROYER USS DEWEY. I MADE ONE TRIP OUT ON THE DEWEY, AND THEN WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE USS WHITNEY FOR ONE WEEK, AND FROM THERE I WENT

ABOARD THE USS DUNLAP WHERE I REMAINED UNTIL 1944.

WHILE ABOARD THE DUNLAP WE DID CONVOY DUTY DOWN THROUGH THE SOUTH PACIFIC, HITTING MOST OF THE ISLANDS. WE DID A LOT OF PATROLLING AROUND THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS FOR A WHILE, AND THEN OUR SQUADRON WAS PICKED BY ADMIRAL HALSEY TO ESCORT HIS SHIP (THE USS ENTERPRISE) DOWN THROUGH THE WAR ZONE. WE RAN INTO A FEW MAJOR ENGAGEMENTS SUCH AS CORAL SEA, MIDWAY, AND A FEW OTHERS. WE WERE GIVEN THE DUTY OF ESCORTING LANDING CRAFT FROM GUADALCANAL UP THROUGH THE NEW GEORGIA ISLANDS. THERE WAS A GROUP OF JAP SHIPS THAT KEPT SINKING OUR LANDING CRAFT AT VILLA GULF. THE SHIPS WERE KNOWN AS THE TOKYO EXPRESS, BECAUSE THEY ALWAYS STRUCK AT NIGHT. ADMIRAL HALSEY ORDERED OUR SQUADRON OF DESTROYERS TO INTERCEPT THEM, SO WITH COMMODORE MOOSEBERGER ABOARD THE DUNLAP WE LED FIVE DESTROYERS UP INTO VILLA GULF AND 10:30 PM WE INTERCEPTED FOUR JAP SHIPS (A CRUISER AND THREE DESTROYERS). WE SANK ALL FOUR SHIPS WITHOUT THEM FIRING A SHOT WE RECEIVED NUMEROUS WRITTEN COMMENDATIONS FOR A JOB WELL DONE. BECAUSE BY SINKING THESE SHIPS WE SAVED A LOT OF LIVES.

WE WERE THEN ORDERED BACK TO PEARL HARBOR, AND THEN ON TO MARE ISLAND SHIP YARD (VALLEJO CAL) FOR MINOR REPAIRS, THEN BACK TO PEARL HARBOR. THERE WE RECEIVED ORDERS ALONG WITH TWO OTHER DESTROYERS TO ESCORT THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER SARATOGA TO COLOMBO CEYLON, AND TO OPERATE WITH THE ENGLISH FLEET, AFTER A FEW WEEKS WE WERE GIVEN ORDERS TO RETURN BACK TO PEARL HARBOR, ON THE WAY BACK WE STOPPED IN SYDNEY AUSTRALIA AND HOBART, TASMANIA. (WE ALSO SPENT TEN DAYS IN NEW ZEALAND).

IN 1944 I WAS SENT TO SEATTLE WASHINGTON FOR SMALL LANDING CRAFT TRAINING. AFTER COMPLETION OF OUR TRAINING WE WERE SENT TO ASTORIA OREGON TO PUT THE USS NEWBERRY APA 154 IN COMMISSION. FROM ASTORIA WE WENT TO LONG BEACH CA FOR MORE TRAINING, AFTER THIS WE PUT INTO PORT HUYNEME AT OXNARD CA TO TAKE ON SUPPLIES, AND THEN HEADED FOR PEARL HARBOR AFTER TRAINING OUT OF PEARL FOR A WHILE WE HEADED FOR THE INVASION OF IWO JIMA (THAT WAS WHEN ONE OF MY MOST HORRIFYING EXPERIENCES OCCURRED). AFTER LANDING AND UNLOADING MARINES ON THE BEACH I HEADED BACK FOR THE SHIP, WHEN A JAP MORTAR WENT THROUGH AND EXPLODED IN THE BOW OF MY BOAT. BY RUNNING AT FULL SPEED WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE IT BACK TO THE SHIP BEFORE THE BOAT SANK. FROM IWO JIMA WE WENT TO JOIN OTHER SHIPS IN THE INVASION OF OKINAWA. I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT INVASION, BECAUSE OUR FLOTILLA OF SHIPS WENT IN ON ONE SIDE OF THE ISLAND, AND STAGED A MOCK LANDING DRAWING THE JAPS DOWN TO REPEL US, AND IN DOING SO, IT ALLOWED OUR MAIN FORCE TO LAND ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND, AND COVER HALF OF THE ISLAND BEFORE MEETING AND OPPOSITION. AFTER THE OKINAWA INVASION WE WENT TO GUAM AND THEN TO OAKLAND CA TO PICK UP A LOAD OF TROOPS FOR SAIPAN. ABOUT HALF WAY BETWEEN CALIFORNIA AND HAWAII THE WAR ENDED. WE DROPPED THE TROOPS OFF AT SAIPAN, AND CAME BACK TO PEARL HARBOR. THERE WE RECEIVED ORDERS TO GO TO NORFOLK VIRGINIA AND DECOMMISSION THE USS NEWBERRY. AFTER DECOMMISSIONING THE SHIP, WE WERE GIVEN LEAVE WITH ORDERS TO REPORT TO THE NEAREST RECEIVING STATION TO OUR HOME. THIS HAPPENED TO BE TREASURE ISLAND, CA. BECAUSE MY HOME WAS NOW IN SAN FRANCISCO. I WAS SENT TO GREAT LAKES FOR DISCHARGE IN 1946 AND THEN CAME BACK TO SAN FRANCISCO WHERE I SETTLED DOWN WITH MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER. I WORKED FOR WESTERN PIPE AND STEEL CO. FOR STANDARD OIL CO. I DROVE STREET CARS AND BUSES FOR SAN FRANCISCO. AND THEN I WORKED FOR GOODYEAR RUBBER CO UNTIL I WAS ABLE TO GET A JOB WITH THE NAVY ON TREASURE ISLAND. WHERE I WORKED UNTIL JUNE OF 1974, AND THEN I RETIRED. I HAVE BEEN MARRIED FORTY YEARS (40). I HAVE A BEAUTIFUL WIFE (LOIS) AND SIX CHILDREN, AND TWELVE GRAND CHILDREN. I OWN MY OWN HOME. I JOINED THE NAVY AT THE AGE OF TWENTY ONE (21) AND AM NOW SIXTY-FOUR, AND THIS IS THE STORY OF FORTY-THREE YEARS OF MY LIFE.